

# COLONIAL HERITAGE NEWS

Summer 2006

GREENSBORO PARKS &  
RECREATION

Volume 1, Issue 1

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## Thank You

- ◆ Our Lady of Grace School made a donation to THP in appreciation of staff participation during their Colonial Fair.
- ◆ "Tannenbaum Historic Park: Greensboro's Best Kept Secret" continues to air on channel 13. The video won a "Telly" award for outstanding local, regional, and cable television commercials and programs.
- ◆ The Tannenbaum-Sternberger Foundation has given a generous gift to pay for exhibit master planning.

In late June 2006, City Council asked all City of Greensboro Departments to submit a plan eliminating 8% of full time City staff. Although many of these positions were later saved by a tax increase, 3 full time Parks & Recreation positions were lost. One of those was our Program and Volunteer Coordinator, Harold Gunn.

*"Thank you Mr. Gunn. Did you have fun because I know I did! I had so much fun I'm coming back with my family."*

*-Peter, a public school student*

The loss is twofold. On a personal level we are losing a friend who has been a valued member of our staff for 18 years. Harold was transferred to Country Park as site's much needed assistant manager on July 1, 2006.

On a professional level we are losing 25% of our staff at a time when our responsibilities are greatly increasing. None of

We are pleased to send you this inaugural issue of Colonial Heritage News.

Each quarter we will keep you up to date with the latest news, upcoming events, and interesting bits of information we've unearthed. We'll also let you know about our plans for

## Latest News



HAROLD GUNN

us is truly capable of filling Harold's shoes as a tour guide. Harold is able to capture and maintain student interest like no one you have ever seen. We will try to fill in for Harold but other responsibilities will require us to reduce the number, size, and frequency of tours, programs and volunteer activities.

We will see Harold often as he and other Country Park staff help us to cover our grounds-keeping needs during Bucky

*"Dear Mr. Harold,*

*I thank you for all the things you have [done] for us. Thank you for teaching about the military war. Thank you Mr. Harold"*

*-Prince, a "Blast From the Past" Camper, July 2005*

Johnston's extended medical leave.

Tannenbaum Historic Park needs you to help us move forward. We are a small staff that is growing smaller every day but we have big dreams and plans for maintaining the excellent reputation Harold and others have helped us to achieve. Don't let this opportunity to make a difference pass you by. Get involved. Find out what you can do to help. Tell your friends and neighbors what a special place historical education and Tannenbaum Historic Park have in our community.

## Start the Presses!

the future. But most of all we would like you to know how much we appreciate the interest you have in all things historical and Tannenbaum Park in particular. We will create a new newsletter every spring, summer, fall, and winter for your further edification and enjoyment.



Thanks to a very generous donation from Alpha

Mailing in Shelby, NC the paper newsletter is printed and shipped free of charge.

[www.alphamail.com](http://www.alphamail.com)

## STATE OF THE EXHIBITS



BRENT WARD

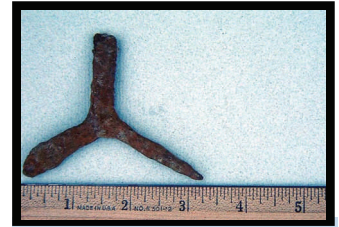
With the help of the Tannenbaum-Sternberger Foundation, Tannenbaum Historic Park and the Guilford Battleground Company have hired Riggs Ward Design in Richmond, Virginia to plan and create the update of our core exhibit, which will be completed in 2011. Riggs Ward is an award-winning design firm that has

created dozens of beautiful exhibits for the Library of Congress, the Smithsonian Institution, and many others. If you'd like to take a look at some of their exhibits, check out their website:

[www.riggsward.com](http://www.riggsward.com)

If you get a chance to stop by the park we have the first draft exhibit plans on display, and they are truly fantastic!

## What Is It?



- a. A Highland throwing star used for mid range combat.
- b. A Y-pattern British Musket tool used as screwdriver and pick.
- c. A Quaker dowsing rod used to locate peaceful waters.
- d. A Hessian harness ornament from the original Mercedes horse wagons.

(found near the Hoskins House)

"What Is It?" answer: b

## In the Summer of 1781...

**PERHAPS THE MOST PECULIAR CASE THE COURT SAW WAS THAT OF PORCH DECAIN.**

In August 1781, the Guilford County Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions convened for the first time since the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. The sessions reveal a community returning to everyday life after military occupation.

The court appointed Moses McCuiston as a road overseer "in the room of Arthur Forbes", Thomas Archer to a tax collector post "in Mr. Caldwell's district" and Daniel Gillespie was sworn in as the new sheriff. The judges, Robert McKamie,

William Goudy, and William Clark, also proved several wills including that of Colonel Arthur Forbis of the Guilford Militia who died of wounds received during the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. Perhaps the most peculiar case the court saw was that of Porch Decain.

*"Ordered that Francis McBride be cited to appear at this court tomorrow to show cause if any he can why he detains a mulatto boy named porch in this service when it is supposed he ought to have his freedom."*

*"Agreeable to the citation issued this term, Francis McBride appeared with his servant Porch Decain who had petitioned for his freedom, the said complaint being heard the Court are of the opinion that the said Francis McBride detain the said Porch Decain as his servant until he arrive to the age of thirty one unless further proof is shown to this Court to the contrary."*



What does this mean for Porch? For more, see page 3.

## ...A Peculiar Court Case

from page 2 Put yourself in Porch's place for just a second. You're a young black man with few rights in a court of law. Despite this, you build up enough courage to walk into the courthouse and claim that you are free despite the protests of a prominent local white citizen. Perhaps you were falsely promised your freedom for serving in the Continental Army, sadly an all too common occurrence. Perhaps you were born to free black parents. Whatever the case, you had no proof. The presiding judges listen to you and order your would-be slave master to appear the following day and provide proof of ownership.

And there your future hangs in the balance; you will either be free or enslaved for the rest of your life. But then something strange happens. Francis McBride,

your self-proclaimed slave master, is unable to provide documentation, and the judges decide to split the difference between slave and free -- they rule that you are to be an indentured servant until the age of 31. It is a small victory to still remain another man's property. You are not free until your term of indenture ends, but then, slavery's only term was life, and you have the promise that one day you will be free.

Little is known of Porch Decain's life. Nine years after the August 1781 court session, the 1790 Census revealed that Mr. McBride no longer had possession of Porch. Did he run away? Was he sold to another owner? Did he turn 31 before 1790? Did he die before gaining his freedom? We may never know...



**DID PORCH RUN AWAY?**

## What's New?

Glad you asked. Let's begin with the Hoskins' house. This spring Dr. Henri Grissino-Mayer, a renowned dendrochronology expert, and his students from the University of Tennessee Geography department were able to definitively date the construction of the Hoskins' house. Their report reveals a significant grouping of 28 logs in the house whose cutting date falls between 1811 and 1813. That means that the Hoskins house was built



**HOSKINS HOUSE BUILT 1813**

in 1813. So, where is Joseph Hoskins' original house? That's a good question, and we're working on a number of leads by tracking family history and deed research to put the rest of the picture together.

As soon as we have an answer we'll let you know.

As a side note, the folks at the High Point Museum hired a colleague of Dr. Grissino-Mayer from Oxford University, Dr. Daniel Miles, who was working on a date for the museum's Hoggatt house. The two dendrochronologists were able to come up with solid dates for the Hoskins house (1813) and the Hoggatt house (1801) by comparing their research.



## Volunteers



Rick Surles is our volunteer blacksmith. He moved to Greensboro from upstate New York in 1983 and found his way to Tannenbaum on July 4, 2004. He admitted that he was a blacksmith and began working in the Melson Forge in September of 2004.

What makes Rick so fun to have around the park, beyond his appreciation of quality ice-cream, "coiffée" (java) and "doigs" (canines) is his desire to teach and learn the "Arts and Mysteries" of smithing. Rick has the rare ability to successfully practice his trade while simultaneously entertaining and informing the public.

## EXPLORE HISTORY!

### Tannenbaum Historic Park

2200 New Garden Road  
Greensboro, NC 27410  
Phone: 336.545.5315  
Fax: 336.545.5315  
e-mail: [history@greensboro-nc.gov](mailto:history@greensboro-nc.gov)  
Open Tuesday–Saturday 10 a.m.–4 p.m.

#### Our Mission:

To teach and tell the stories of everyday life in Guilford County, North Carolina before, during and after the American Revolution

To preserve and protect the Hoskins House Historic District ~ part of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse National Historic Landmark

To preserve historic lands and provide green space for leisure activities within the urban landscape of Greensboro



A Greensboro Parks & Recreation Facility



If, for any reason, you prefer to receive this newsletter via post or wish to be removed from our list, please let us know.

## Schedule of Events



**Tuesday, July 4th 2006**

Explore History & Independence Day Exhibit Opening



**Sunday August 27 2006**

High Lonesome Strings Bluegrass Concert—2 p.m.



**CANCELLED**

Explore History Hallowe'en Stories & Tales of Ghosts



**TENTATIVE**

Explore History & Holiday Exhibit Opening



**March 17-18th 2007**

Reenactment of the Battle of Guilford Courthouse at Price Park—2 p.m.

...along with many other commemorative events at Tannenbaum Historic Park and Guilford Courthouse National Military Park

Don't forget to visit Guilford Courthouse National Military Park at 2332 New Garden Road

## Local Places



Nearly 40 years before the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, early Lutheran settlers were busy constructing the first European community in what is now Guilford County. If you travel just two miles north of Gibsonville on highway 61 you'll find the Frieden's Lutheran Church and cemetery. They are the oldest in the county. Frieden's was originally constructed around 1745 and the cemetery contains soapstone and slate tombstones dating back to 1750.

Learn more about early brick and stone churches in the premiere issue of the [Journal of Backcountry Studies](#). Gary R. Freeze's article *Reading "the Writing on the Walls" of Backcountry Rowan County's Stone Sanctuaries, 1774–1795*, is online at [www.uncg.edu/~rmcalhoo/jbs/](http://www.uncg.edu/~rmcalhoo/jbs/)